5. *Safety Last*

The election was won, the Doctor's Mandate granted, the Post Office Savings Bank deposits secured, Snowden become a Viscount and his place as Chancellor of the Exchequer taken by Mr. Neville Chamberlain; and again the National Government was presented with the unfortunate necessity of doing something. Sir John Simon might insist that the Government 'was a happy family with no internal dissensions/ and the Prime Minister that he had 'never known a Cabinet which works so well together as the present one'; but an unprecedented electoral triumph had not obliterated the divisions which prevented the Cabinet from agreeing on a programme to put before the electorate. Sir Herbert Samuel was still a firm believer in Free Trade, and his Conservative colleagues in Protection; the Prime Minister still called himself an 'old-fashioned Socialist',[1] and spoke earnestly of disarmament and the League of Nations; whereas few of the 554 Members of Parliament whose leader he ostensibly was, shared these vague predilections. As before the General Election, so after it, the Cabinet found themselves in agreement only on

[1] MacDonald never disavowed Socialism, though his references to it soon became, in the circumstances inevitably, rare, and even for him, vague. On one occasion, in the course of a parliamentary debate on

Socialism, a Labour member memorised, and repeated, a speech the Prime Minister had once made in a similar debate. MacDonald was thus put in the position of having to refute his own arguments without admitting that he no longer accepted their validity—a test of dialectical skill which even Jesuits might regard as severe, and which called for the exercise of all his masterly incoherence.